

Review Essay: Whence Did German Propaganda Films Derive Their Power?

Ian Garden's *The Third Reich's Celluloid War:
Propaganda in Nazi Feature Films, Documentaries,
and Television*

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The history of cinema is an important tool for understanding the use of film for propaganda and indoctrination. Scholars of propaganda should be grateful to Ian Garden, because his *The Third Reich's Celluloid War*¹ is a comprehensive and insightful history of Nazi propaganda films. He holds that the Nazis understood propaganda to be a powerful weapon and that they wielded it more effectively than did the Allies. He also notes, though, that the Nazi propaganda machine made a great number of mistakes. He seeks to explain the key features of the major German propaganda films, the degree to which they were propagandistic, and how effective they were. Upon reviewing his work, I conclude that although Garden offers thoughtful reflections in many ways, he understates the unique power of Nazi propaganda film.

Garden discusses briefly the nature of propaganda, defining it as messaging aimed at persuasion (p. 11). Understood that way, propaganda is a benign concept; however, after persistent misuse over a century by political agents, it now pejoratively means the dispersing of mendacious information. On his view, propaganda doesn't necessarily involve lying or distorting the truth—though it often does. Propaganda may involve stating facts that are true, but they are so selectively presented that they mislead the audience into the point of view the propagandist is pushing. Garden adds that this sort of biased reporting—called “special pleading”—is difficult to get away with in a society that has a free and balanced press, because competing media can present the other side (p. 12).

¹ Ian Garden, *The Third Reich's Celluloid War: Propaganda in Nazi Feature Films, Documentaries, and Television* (Gloucestershire, UK: The History Press, 2012).

Propaganda was essential to the Nazi regime. Adolf Hitler wrote at length about it in his political manifesto, *Mein Kampf*.² When he first joined the German Labor Party in 1921, he took charge of the party's propaganda campaign. Hitler believes that the main reason Germany lost World War I was that the British and French used propaganda more effectively than did Germany (p. 14). He especially admires the way the Marxist Socialists used propaganda in the Soviet Union. He also believes in "market differentiation," that is, that different subgroups had to be addressed differently. While sophisticated people need more well-reasoned propaganda, the masses require cruder methods and constant repetition. Hitler's rules regarding propaganda are that it should be: focused, consistent, never diluted by objective analysis, limited in scope, and repeated often (p. 15).

Garden next discusses Joseph Goebbels's theory of propaganda. Immediately upon taking power in January 1933, the Nazi regime set up the Reich's Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. Headed by Goebbels, it grew rapidly, winding up by 1941 with a budget of 187 million Reich marks and a staff of 2,000 (p. 16). This ministry controlled all media, including the one Goebbels felt to be the most important: radio. He pays special attention to the film industry, since he believes that film is easily comprehended even by the uneducated and that it has a more immediate impact on emotions. A specific branch of the ministry—the Reich's Film Chamber—was set up to handle film. Goebbels had total control; he approved all scripts, decided which films could air, and directed film companies regarding the sorts of film they would make. Also cementing Nazi control of film production was the establishment of a state bank for funding movies. By early 1942, the whole cinema industry was nationalized.

Goebbels's theory of propaganda overlaps with Hitler's, but it is more sophisticated and involves seven core theses (p. 19). First, one central authority should direct all propaganda. Second, propaganda must attract the public's attention and be transmitted through a medium the public finds interesting. Third, propaganda must be credible—true wherever feasible, but if lies are employed, they should be wherever possible unprovable. Fourth, propaganda should be part of a campaign, meaning it should be carefully planned and effectively timed. Fifth, propaganda should include loaded phrases, labels, and descriptions, repeated continuously.³ Sixth, propaganda

² Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999).

³ Garden never mentions the crucial influence on Hitler and Goebbels of nineteenth-century social psychologist Gustave Le Bon. Le Bon wrote a highly influential treatise that shaped the minds of all propaganda theorists (including Benito Mussolini and V. I. Lenin) in the first half of the twentieth century called *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895). He explores the crucial role of repetition in advertising and propaganda.

should not raise false hopes, but should instead instill fear of defeat and a sense of solidarity in the struggle for victory. Seventh, propaganda should focus the public's hatred upon specific objects.

Garden observes that Nazi cinema had five overarching goals (pp. 20-21). The first was promoting the Nazi Party in general and Hitler in particular to the German public. Remember that the Nazis assumed power by plurality, never by majority vote, so the party needed "up-selling." Here, the purpose was selling the Nazi "brand." Second, Nazi cinema was intended to promote the central tenets of Nazi ideology. Third, the regime's movies were intended to promote its image to the rest of the world. Fourth, Nazi cinema aimed at justifying the war to the German public. Finally, Nazi cinema was designed to bolster public morale—in effect, to sell Stoicism—which was very important after 1940, as German cities were being bombed.

Garden then reviews five Nazi anti-British films. Hitler's thinking about Britain evolved over time (pp. 23-24). Hitler secretly admired Britain for its imperial success, and from 1932 to 1938, Hitler hoped that Britain would join Germany in dividing up Europe. Even after Britain entered the war in 1939, Hitler hoped for some peaceful accommodation. Goebbels, however, pushed the film companies to come up with anti-British films.

In the first film, *The Fox of Glenarvon* (1940), the attack on the English is mounted by a defense of Ireland. The convoluted plot is set in Ireland of the early twentieth century. It involves a love triangle between an Irish nobleman and the patriotic Irish wife of the local duplicitous Justice of the Peace. The story centers around the (ultimately unsuccessful) attempt by a brutal Englishman to put down the Irish resistance.

The second anti-British film the Nazis produced was *The Heart of the Queen* (1940). This film was based upon the actual historical figures of Mary, Queen of Scots, and her cousin Elizabeth, Queen of England. By various machinations, Elizabeth is able to try, convict, and execute Mary, whose death is portrayed as unjustly driven by Elizabeth's envy and hatred of Mary.

The third anti-British film, *My Life for Ireland* (1941), centers on the Irish war for independence. The plot involves the son of an Irish rebel who was executed when the boy was still in his mother's womb. He is enrolled in an English boarding school that was set up to indoctrinate Irish children to support British control of Ireland. He is smitten by his friend's mother, informs on her out of jealousy (resulting in her incarceration), but then is instrumental in freeing her.

The fourth anti-British Nazi film, *Uncle Kruger* (1941), is set during the Second Boer War (between the British and the Dutch settlers who had earlier moved to South Africa). The movie recounts the history of the war through the eyes of elderly Boer leader Paul ("Uncle") Kruger. It portrays the British as deciding to take over South Africa for its rich gold reserves. A British agent tries to incite the indigenous blacks, leading Kruger to help his people fight the British. The British send in their troops, who burn Boer villages and intern Boer women and children in concentration camps. In one

scene, we see a British officer who looks like Winston Churchill shoot an unarmed woman in a concentration camp for protesting the conditions. It is arguably the most powerful of the anti-British propaganda movies.

The fifth anti-British propaganda movie is *Titanic* (1943). The Nazi treatment of this familiar story portrays the sinking as due to the greed of capitalists, especially the head of the cruise ship line, who ignores warnings by the (fictional) German First Officer. The film ends with the intertitle: "THE DEATHS OF 1500 PEOPLE REMAIN UNATONED FOR—AN ETERNAL CONDEMNATION OF ENGLAND'S QUEST FOR PROFIT!"

The first four of these films portray the British as cold and cunning international bullies. The two films set in Ireland push the narrative of a bond between the Germans and the Irish, who are both depicted as victims of British aggression. When shown in Nazi-occupied territories, the films underscored the evils of imperialism (p. 51). The last two films advance the image of the British as venal capitalists.

Garden then examines four feature-length anti-Semitic films. He points out that although both Hitler and Goebbels were clearly committed anti-Semites by the early 1920s, there were no explicitly anti-Semitic movies until 1939. He explains that Hitler did not want to antagonize Jews, viewing them as powerful in international finance (p. 74). It was only in 1939 when Hitler became annoyed at what he saw as anti-Nazi films coming out of Hollywood that he decided to produce anti-Jewish films.

I'm not convinced that Garden's explanation here works. The Nazis never hid their anti-Semitism. They passed laws in 1933 depriving Jews of the right to own land, kicked them out of the labor front in 1934, and kicked them out of the military in 1935. In 1935 they also passed the infamous Nuremberg Race Laws. These measures hardly show a fear of international Jewish financiers.⁴

Garden then turns to anti-American propaganda films. He suggests insightfully that there were several reasons why the Nazis didn't release many anti-American films (p. 92). First, millions of Americans were of German ancestry, who the Nazi Regime viewed as citizens of the Third Reich and hoped would become a fifth column. Second, the longer America could be kept out of the war, the better, so why antagonize a still-neutral country? Third, the U.S. didn't enter the war until December 1941, and since feature films typically take a year or more to produce, any explicitly anti-American film would have to have been started in 1942, at which point the Nazis were focused on the war with Russia and the Final Solution.

Garden discusses three films with anti-American themes. The first, *The Prodigal Son* (1934), is a "homeland" movie set in Tyrol and New York. It compares the splendor of the German mountain region with the squalor of

⁴ For extensive evidence of early anti-Semitic Nazi films, see Gary James Jason, "Selling Genocide I: The Early Films," *Reason Papers* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2016), pp. 127-57.

the American big city in the Depression era. The story is about a Tyrolian boy who is tempted to move to New York, only to become disillusioned and return to his home and true love. The second film, *The Emperor of California* (1936), is loosely based upon the life of Johann Suter (John Sutter), a Swiss of German birth. Suter moved to the U.S. West, where he became quite successful after many struggles. The third anti-American film is *Sensation Trial: Casilla* (1937). The complex plot concerns a German wrongly accused of killing a “child” star, a girl being abused by her step-parents and given drugs to keep her small so as to pass her off as a youth. The German had hidden her in South America. At a circus trial, the German looks doomed, but in the end the star shows up, thus freeing him.

The first film sells Nazi socialism by showing America as a materialist capitalist hell. It also shows Americans as uncaring egoists in an attempt to bolster the Nazis’ solidarity message. The second film isn’t particularly anti-American, though it portrays Americans as being so greedy that they will become prospectors. The third is more negative in its portrayal by showing that the adversarial American legal system leads to circuses rather than real trials, with attorneys more concerned with winning than justice.

Garden then turns to five Nazi anti-Eastern European films. These films fall into two broad categories. First are films that decry the treatment of citizens of German ancestry in other countries. Second are films that warn of Bolshevism and urge that it and, by extension, the Soviet Union had to be destroyed (pp. 117-18). (The latter films were held in abeyance during the year-and-a-half that the non-aggression pact with the Soviets was in effect [p. 119].)

From the first category Garden discusses *Refugees* (1933), in which Bolshevik soldiers attack the Volga-German refugees stuck in the Russia-China borderland in Manchuria. He also discusses *Homecoming* (1941), set in 1939 Poland. It shows Polish citizens destroying a German school. Later, when the Polish army mobilizes, the German community grows deeply anxious. When some of them are caught listening to a speech by Hitler on the radio, they are arrested and a number of them are killed before being rescued by the German army and returning to Germany. In these films, the Russians and the Poles, respectively, are portrayed as having a genocidal hatred of Germans and as vicious killers.

Regarding anti-Bolshevik films, Garden discusses *For the Rights of Man* (1934). It is set in Germany at the end of World War I, and tells the story of four returning German soldiers, two of whom join the communist party. In this film, communists are portrayed as drunken womanizers, and as Jews loyal to the Soviet Union rather than Germany. He also discusses *Frisians in Peril* (1935), in which Bolsheviks are shown as atheistic criminals. Here, an innocent ethnic German village is invaded by the Bolshevik army, demanding all of their grain and livestock to help the starving Soviet masses. The Soviets are shown defiling churches and homes, as well as raping German girls. Garden then discusses *G.P.U.* (1942). The GPU was the Soviet secret security service, and they are depicted as murderous thugs. The convoluted plot

involves two GPU spies, one who passes as a concert violinist and the other as a diplomat. The violinist/agent discovers that the other informed on her parents; she informs on him and commits suicide in the end.

Garden takes up Nazi feature films that propagandize nationalism and pro-Nazi sentiment. He discusses four sorts of films in this regard: Kampfzeit films, military action films, spy films, and total war films (pp. 135-44).

Kampfzeit films glorify the Nazis “time of struggle” against their political competitors: mainstream socialists and communists in the late 1920s and the early 1930s. All of these films portray communists as ruthless murderers, who are disloyal to Germany, and some portray them as licentious and degenerate. The first of these that Garden discusses is *Storm Trooper Brand* (1933), which presents a vision of the Nazi Brown Shirts as standing up for Germany and against the exploitation of the German worker. The second film, *Hitler Youth Quex* (1933), features a young hero who is the son of an unemployed communist worker. His father is disappointed when his son (representing the new generation of Germans) is drawn to the Hitler Youth rather than the Internationale youth group. When his son is killed by the communists after discovering that they intend to bomb a Hitler Youth camp, the father is won over to the Nazi side. The third film is *Hans Westmar* (1933), which was the most influential and popular of the Kampfzeit films. It is loosely based on the life of Horst Wessel, beloved by the Nazis as a martyr and the composer of the Party’s anthem (made Germany’s co-anthem), “Die Fahne Hoch” (“The flag on High”). The film’s protagonist, Hans, is a Nazi organizer in Berlin. The film portrays Berlin as no longer being a German city, but instead “cosmopolitan”—with nightclubs full of decadent jazz and lascivious dancing. Germany is being paralyzed by communists, who kill Hans to silence him.

Military action movies praise the German fighting spirit. These films all fostered pride in being German by showing Germans as tough, unselfish fighters. Garden’s view is that many of these films were poorly done and include a lot of newsreel footage. Of the four he discusses, three poor-quality ones were released in 1941: *Battle Squadron Lutzow*, *Stukas*, and *U-Boats Westward!* The first film is about members of a bomber crew who see action in Poland before heading off to fight in England. Among other scenes, we see their bomber fend off Polish soldiers bent upon killing defenseless ethnic German civilians. The second film is about a Stuka (dive bomber) squadron. The airmen are shown to be a tightly knit group and fearless in action, rescuing downed comrades and bearing up under mistreatment when three of their ranks become French prisoners-of-war (POWs). The third film is about a U-boat (submarine) in action off the Orkney Islands. This film spends a good deal of time on scenes of the crew members interacting with their shipmates and their families at home.

The best of the four films is *Request-Concert* (1940). Besides being popular with the public, it was one of Goebbels’s favorites as well. The plot is basically an uplifting love story, centered on a heroic pilot, his true love, and

several soldiers. Unifying the story and the characters is the “Wunschkonzert” (“Request-Concert”), which was a very popular radio program in Nazi Germany that played music requested by listeners. The key scene in the movie shows one of the soldiers playing a church organ to help his fellows find their way home, but paying for it with his life. This film fostered pride in German culture and the supportive role of German women.

The third group of nationalistic propaganda feature films is spy films. Garden briefly discusses *Traitor* (1936), *Watch Out! The Enemy Is Listening!* (1940), and *The Golden Web* (1943). He characterizes them all as B-quality films with predictable plots. The first is about a foreign agent of an unnamed government trying to get information on the strength of the growing German armed forces. The second involves British agents trying to steal information about a new type of wire invented by the Nazis. The third is about Soviet agents trying to get the plans for a new German tank.

The fourth type of nationalistic feature propaganda film is total war films. These are movies made near the end of the war urging the civilian populace to fight in the face of forces soon to invade Germany itself. The greatest of these was *Kolberg* (1945). Filmed in color and using as extras thousands of German troops taken off the battlefield at a time when the Nazis were losing on all fronts, it was the most expensive feature film the Nazis ever made (p. 160). The film recreates the battle of the city of Kolberg against Napoleon’s forces in 1807, and it features a heroic general defending the city against overwhelming odds. It was not a box office hit, in great part because by the time it appeared, most German theaters had been hit by bombs (p. 169), and *Kolberg* fell to the Soviets just a short time after the film was released. Garden comments that it failed to rouse German civilians to fight to the bitter end. This comment is unpersuasive, however, because even as the Allies entered from the West and the Soviets from the East, there was no collapse of the home front.

Garden also examines the Nazi production of “pure” entertainment movies. Between its rise to power to its final defeat, the regime produced over 1,300 feature films, with the onset of war in 1939 dropping annual film production by 25% (p. 170). As he insightfully notes, the Nazis so revered the power of cinema that even with the nation fully at war, they diverted a lot of scarce resources to continue the extensive production of movies. Only about 10% were propaganda movies, in Garden’s view, though of the remaining 90% that were entertainment, he acknowledges that many contained some or a lot of covert propagandistic elements (p. 171).

I regard Garden’s constriction of what counts as a propaganda film to be a general problem with his book. One aspect of messaging that makes it propaganda is when that message is subliminal, that is, completely deceptive about its true nature. (I will return to this point below.) To his credit, though, Garden notes that even if a movie is purely entertainment, it can serve a propagandistic purpose—specifically, getting civilians’ minds off the hardships of war. As he points out, after the war broke out in 1939, attendance

at German theaters tripled (p. 171). Additionally, such films drew people to the theater, where the regime also aired propaganda shorts and newsreels.

Garden turns next to examining Allied—that is, British and American—propaganda films. He comments that during 1933-1938, neither Britain nor the U.S. produced any overtly anti-Nazi films (p. 193). However, Britain had secretly formulated plans for controlling information should war occur (p. 195). It then created the Ministry of Information (MOI) the day after war broke out in 1939. From then on, the MOI vetted British films, suggested subjects to film producers, and at the start of the war it even financed some of the movies. The themes the MOI promoted were the justice of the British cause and the need for sacrifice.

The U.S. established its own Office of War Information to oversee all government information services, and it in turn set up the Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) to work with American producers to create films that would help the war effort (p. 195). Since the U.S. had been attacked first by Japan (after which Germany declared war on it as well), little need existed to justify the war to the American public. The focus was primarily on showing the need for sacrifice and portraying the war as going well (which, early on, it wasn't). As the war progressed, films got more anti-Nazi.

Garden points out several differences between the Allied and Nazi propaganda campaigns (p. 197). The Nazis moved to control all media (including film) immediately upon achieving power, using the media to justify their regime and portray their enemies as evil nations or races. The Allies didn't control the film industry until actually going to war, didn't use film to justify their democratic form of government, and tended to target the Nazis specifically rather than Germans generally. I would add that at no point did the Allied governments totally control their film industries, much less nationalize their film industries, much less totally control all media, much less entirely eliminate free speech.

Garden also compares the themes and styles of the propaganda films that both sides produced. Nazi propaganda films portray the British generally as ruthless, mendacious imperialists. Americans are portrayed generally as greedy, decadent, and weakly governed. Allied propaganda films tend to portray the Nazis as mendacious, ruthless imperialists, as well as murderous fanatics (p. 198); such films often attempt to distinguish Nazis from "ordinary" Germans. However, distinguishing Nazis from ordinary Germans was rather difficult in the face of the fact that the Nazis won a decisive plurality of the votes (44%, more than double that of the runner-up party) in the last election before the Regime took control.

The British portrayed themselves as unflappable and brave (p. 199). In a few films, the MOI allowed the filmmakers to show men called up for service as initially unenthusiastic, but when in action, those men became good soldiers, brave and committed to the defense of their country (p. 200). American films portray American soldiers as uniformly brave. Both sides tended to portray God as being on their side, but a number of Allied films went further, showing Nazis desecrating churches or even shooting

churchgoers (p. 201). What Garden doesn't question is whether Nazi ideology was accepting of Christianity specifically or monotheism generally. To the extent they revered Friedrich Nietzsche as one of their philosophic heroes—which they surely did—and to the extent Nietzsche rejected Judeo-Christian thought as “slave morality,” you would not expect to see Nazis routinely invoking God in their propaganda.

Garden notes that both the Nazis and the Allies were similar in stressing the need for women to sacrifice and be supportive of spouses who were called to war (p. 202), though Allied films elevate the role of women to a much greater degree. For evidence, he points to *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), which shows the title character capturing an escaped Nazi pilot, and to *Went the Day Well?* (1942), which shows an elderly English woman killing a Nazi paratrooper (p. 203). Moreover, the Allies had movies showing women working in the armed services and as secret agents. Garden doesn't conjecture why there was this difference in focus, but I would suggest that it is due to Nazis emphasizing the idea that all good German (Aryan) women should produce many children for the state.

One comes away from this discussion feeling that Garden has set up a (false) moral equivalence between Nazi and Allied propaganda films. For example, did the Allies create anything like *Jud Suss* or *Campaign in Poland*? Can we even put *Mrs. Miniver* in the same category as *The Eternal Jew*? (I will return to this point below.)

Garden next discusses Nazi documentaries, mentioning a number of relatively unknown ones in addition to examining some prominent ones. Two relatively unknown early films are *Blood and Soil—Foundations for the New Reich* (1933) and *Eternal Forest—[The] Meaning of Nature in the Third Reich* (1936). *Blood and Soil* focuses on the growing wave of farm bankruptcies during the 1920s and early 1930s. The film's main plot is about a poor farming family struggling during the Weimar Republic, and it ends by showing the new, wonderful Nazi farms. *Eternal Forest* shows a forest changing through the four seasons, and then displays the role that forests played in German history.

Garden's take on these documentaries is that they are intended to convey the message that “all people of German blood should maintain the right to live on the land of their forefathers” (p. 212). However, I don't think that, in these films, the Nazis were selling the idea that Germans had a right to their land—something most Germans would have considered obvious. Instead, these films are marketing the Nazi brand, its defining ideology. Specifically, the first film focuses on the unity of the Volk, which means elevating the importance of the farmer. Nazi ideology holds that all of the Volk (businesspeople, intellectuals, workers, professionals, tradesmen, soldiers, farmers, etc.) must unite under the Party's direction for the higher national purpose. The second film focuses on an often overlooked aspect of the Nazi worldview: its neo-paganism. Nazis are believers in the purity of nature and in encouraging people to experience it firsthand as an antidote to

unhealthy, cosmopolitan urban life. In short, Nazi ideology includes a big dollop of environmentalism.

Garden also reviews documentaries intended to promote Hitler and celebrate key events in the Party's history. Famous (or infamous) German director Leni Riefenstahl made documentaries promoting the Nazi Party and Hitler. All were paeans to the Party, lovingly celebrating the Party's pageants, parades, and spectacles. One was a film about the Fifth Party Congress, called *The Victory of Faith* (1934). Garden notes that while the film was popular in Germany, it was not particularly outstanding.

Riefenstahl's film about the Sixth Party Congress, *Triumph of the Will* (1935), is much better done—indeed, it is widely considered to be one of the most powerful propaganda films ever made. Shown continuously throughout the regime's reign, it was banned in Germany after the war, and is still banned. Garden observes that this film's main purpose is to portray the Fuhrer and the Party as powerful and a unifying force for Germany. This is done by scenes showing crowds' adoration of Hitler and the power that his rhetoric had on listeners. I would add that the film stresses the unity of Germany, and cite a scene that Garden omits.⁵ In it, young workers present their spades like rifles. A handsome worker asks each where he is from, and we find out that each represents a different region of Germany. The idea here is twofold: all regions of the country and all types of people (workers, farmers, soldiers, etc.) are united under Hitler.

A third Riefenstahl documentary is *Olympia* (1938), based on the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. The film is in two parts. The first, *Festival of the People*, takes the viewer through space and time, from the ruins in Greece to the runners carrying the Olympic torch across Europe into the giant Berlin Olympic Stadium. It then shows the opening ceremony, highlights the key moments of some of the competitions, and shows the final winners. The second, *Festival of Beauty*, shows various athletes in training and competition, including a mass gymnastic exercise with thousands of young men and women.

Artistically, the film was quite a success, especially when you consider that it was the first documentary of the Olympics ever made. But how does it rank as propaganda? Here, Garden seems puzzled: "It would be harsh to class this film in the same category as *Triumph [of the Will]* because, despite several scenes featuring Hitler and the Nazi elite, the content of the film is actually a fairly accurate representation of what occurred at the Berlin Olympics, and there is little attempt to conceal those scenes which are less than flattering to Nazi ideology and Aryan supremacy" (p. 226). For example, "non-Aryan" athletes are figured prominently winning events. He concedes

⁵ For a discussion of this omitted scene, see Gary James Jason, "Ein Volk, Ein Fuhrer," *Liberty* (April 2007), pp. 48-51, accessed online at: http://www.libertyunbound.com/sites/printerarchive/Liberty_Magazine_Apri_2007.pdf.

that there are slight elements of propaganda, such as Nazi Germany hosting such an event flawlessly, Hitler opening the events, and swastikas affixed to the German athletes' uniforms. He also notes that the film was funded by the Nazi regime, and Goebbels classified it as being "politically and artistically especially worthy." Would they likely have done such things, if they were really valueless as propaganda?

While propaganda is often designed to sell policies and actions, I would argue that it often more generally aims at advertising the brand. The function of *Olympia*, I suggest, is to sell the Nazi focus on physical health and beauty. That was a big part of Nazi ideology and helped justify their eugenicist program. Nor should we dismiss the Aryan angle. In the 1936 Olympics (which were boycotted by a number of nations), the Germans won 89 out of the 388 medals awarded—25% of all the medals awarded. Compare this with runner-up USA (at almost double the population) receiving only 56 medals. Add to this figure the total number of medals awarded to Austria (13), Sweden (20), the Netherlands (17), Norway (6), Denmark (5), and other countries the Nazis regarded as racially Aryan, and you are at nearly half of all medals awarded.

Documentaries about the Nazis' war victories are indisputably propagandistic in anyone's book. *Campaign in Poland* (1940) advances the narrative that the German population had been brutalized by the (Slavic) Poles, and that Hitler tried to find a peaceful compromise but was repeatedly rebuffed while the Poles amassed their forces on Germany's border. The film ends with footage of the victorious troops in Warsaw, parading past Hitler as the narrator intones, "Germany ought to feel safe under the protection of such an army!" Shortly after *Campaign in Poland*, which focuses primarily on the German Army's operations, the Regime released *Baptism of Fire* (1940), which documents the overwhelming power of the Luftwaffe. It shares the same narrative about why the Nazis "had" to invade Poland. Even more popular was *Victory in the West* (1941). This film argues that Germany's buildup of military forces, which was necessary for protecting its borders, triggered World War I. It further argues that Germany was winning that war completely until England imposed a food blockage on Germany, forcing it to surrender, whereupon it was saddled with the Versailles Treaty that caused Germany's economic depression. The upshot of this narrative, which I call "the Nazi Historical Narrative," is that World War II was merely a continuation of World War I. The bulk of the film celebrates Germany's military campaign against the British forces.

Garden next discusses documentary films advancing the Nazi racial theory and its eugenics and genocide policies. Regarding eugenics, the Regime's Office for Racial Policy early on produced six short films that talked about mental illness and hereditary diseases, and the alleged need for sterilization and euthanasia to combat them. Garden holds that the outbreak of war caused a shortage of hospital resources in 1939, which in turn led the Nazis to implement the Aktion T4 euthanasia campaign. Films produced prior to this campaign include: *The Inheritance* (1935), *The Hereditary Defective*

(1936), *Victims of the Past* (1937), and *All Life Is Struggle* (1937). There were several other short films that Garden might have mentioned in this group. Two silent films were produced in 1935: *Sons of the Father* and *Off Track*. A third silent film was released in 1939: *What You Inherit*. All of these shorts played between feature films at almost every German theater, and were used to push the regime's extermination campaign against the mentally disabled and the sterilization of the genetically physically disabled. Garden notes that the last movie explicitly uses Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to justify the program, but so did the first film, for that matter.

Regarding the genocide of the Jews, Garden focuses primarily on two documentaries. He notes that *The Eternal Jew* (1940) was conceived in 1939, but he doesn't note that the Nazis had an eponymous travelling propaganda exhibition as early as 1937. The film uses archival film footage and presents various historical statements along with putative statistical data to pass itself off as a documentary, but it is clearly a cinematic jeremiad aimed at arousing disgust toward and fear of Jews—their appearance, character, business ethics, religious practices, and contributions to the arts. Garden does a good job of exploring the film's mendacity (pp. 244-45). Although the film was a box-office flop (p. 246), mainly because of the disgusting scenes within it, it was widely shown to various Nazi organizations, including the Hitler Youth.

The second Nazi documentary regarding the Jews is about Theresienstadt, which was held up as the "model" concentration camp. This camp, located in what is now the Czech Republic, functioned from its opening in 1941 until its liberation in mid-1945 as a "transit camp" to hold Jews before sending them to the death camps (such as Auschwitz). After an official visit by the International Red Cross in 1944 resulted in a favorable report about the camp, the Nazis decided to do a documentary showing how well Jews were being treated there. The Nazis coerced a well-known Jewish actor and director, Kurt Gerron, to direct it under close SS supervision. Originally titled *The Fuhrer Gives a City to the Jews*, Gerron called the film *Theresienstadt: A Documentary Film from the Jewish Settlement Area*. The filming was finished in late 1944, but the movie was not completed until March of 1945 and only shown briefly in Prague. By then, a number of Nazi concentration camps had been liberated and the atrocities committed therein had been reported worldwide. The film had limited release and fooled few.⁶

Garden next explores television (TV) in the Nazi era and its use by the regime for propaganda. Although TV technology had existed in the developed world throughout the 1920s and 1930s, with the BBC making its first broadcast as early as 1929, the fact is that the Nazis were the first government to institute regular programming, starting in 1935 and lasting through much of the war. However, Nazi-era TV was limited in reach.

⁶ This film is the subject of a documentary directed by Irmgard Von Zur Muhlen: *Theresienstadt: Deception and Reality* (Artsmagic, Ltd., 2005).

Initially, TV sets were located primarily in “salons,” in post offices, and (later) hospital wards. Still, something like 160,000 Germans watched the Berlin Olympics on TV (p. 262).

As a tool of propaganda, TV was relatively ineffective. As Garden rightly observes, one major Nazi propaganda technique was spectacle—huge parades and intricately choreographed rallies—and those don’t show well on a tiny screen (p. 263). The regime did find TV useful for news and commentary shows, which were of course propagandistic in content. Recalling the point that something can itself not be propaganda but still have a propagandistic use, TV programming featured sports shows and musical reviews which served to entertain war-weary civilians and wounded soldiers in hospital wards. Moreover, the mere fact that the regime beat the world in utilizing this new technology again was of propaganda value to the Party.

Garden concludes the book by asserting that as the Nazi era becomes “distant memory,” several myths have taken hold that he attempts to dispel. First, the Nazis were the masters of propaganda. Second, the majority of Nazi-era cinema was propagandistic. Third, all Nazi-era films were full of lies and evil, and should be “discounted accordingly” (p. 269).

Regarding the myth that the Nazis were masters of propaganda, Garden lists a number of “avoidable” mistakes they made (pp. 270-71). The first was failing to stop films from being completed that were not fully supportive of the regime. As Garden notes, more than thirty films subsequently had to be banned. Second was failing accurately to predict how a propaganda film would affect an audience. For example, the Propaganda Ministry didn’t foresee domestic audiences’ reaction to *The Eternal Jew* or the reaction of audiences in occupied countries to *My Life for Ireland*. A third failure was due to production delays caused by Goebbels’s intervention, including killing some of the directors before completing the film—as happened with the Theresienstadt film. Fourth was the regime’s over-reliance on historical rather than fictional films.

Garden also lists two “unavoidable” mistakes (pp. 271-72). First was the fact that Nazi films often had to be withdrawn because of changing war conditions. For example, anti-Marxist films had to be withdrawn with the signing of the Molotov-Von Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, and then re-released when the Wehrmacht invaded Russia two years later. Second was the difficulty in measuring the real effectiveness of any piece of propaganda. Ticket sales were misleading, as were Goebbels’s own judgment and the SS reports based upon agents planted in every movie audience.

Regarding the myth that all Nazi films were propaganda, Garden merely repeats his earlier point that the vast majority were entertainment and hence cannot be categorized as propaganda.

Regarding the myth that all Nazi films are full of lies and ought to be written off, Garden first makes the logical point that just because the Nazi Regime was viciously evil, that doesn’t mean everything it stood for or created was evil. It invented the freeway, but freeways aren’t evil. Second, while many of the Regime’s propaganda movies exaggerate history, that

doesn't mean that they contain no historical truth. For example, the anti-British movies weren't all false: England did rule Ireland with a heavy hand and fought the Boer War for other than altruistic reasons.

Garden does believe, however, that the Nazi regime clearly showed the power of film propaganda. He makes a point worth more discussion than he gives, namely, that a free press blunts the power of propaganda. Faced with a propaganda movie in a free society, the public can read critical reviews that expose its lies and half-truths, watch movies or read books that lampoon it, or go on the Internet to see what others—especially other countries—think about it (p. 274).

As well done as Garden's book generally is, there are a number of critical observations worth making beyond ones that I note briefly above. One concerns Garden's analysis of Nazi anti-British propaganda. He notes that the Nazis produced little anti-British propaganda before 1940, and even then, it was done over Hitler's reluctance. Garden attributes this to Hitler's secret admiration of British "imperialistic successes" and his hope for British neutrality (pp. 23-24), but this overlooks other plausible explanations. For one thing, the British (Anglo-Saxons) are a Germanic people; their language is derived from German, so Hitler viewed them as essentially "Aryan." Consequently, Hitler never showed toward the British the degree and kind of ideological animosity he displayed for Jews, Slavs, and other ethnicities. I would also add a historical note. When Hitler was serving in the trenches in World War I, he apparently was spared being shot by a British soldier (Henry Tandey), who couldn't bring himself to shoot a wounded German.⁷

Another problem concerns Garden's review of *Robert and Bertram* as anti-Semitic propaganda. He regards the film as not very propagandistic, for two reasons. First, the stereotyping of the Jewish characters is mild, akin to how other national groups like the Scots and the French are caricatured. Second, Garden claims that the real villains in the movie are the two lead characters, both non-Jewish vagabonds, who steal jewelry from the stereotypical Jewish characters. They are portrayed frankly as thieves, even though they go to heaven in the end (p. 74).

Regarding the first point, Garden seems to accept the Nazi view that German Jews are not Germans, but are a separate nationality with distinctive characteristics. However, Jewish Germans were in fact just Germans, acting and speaking like other Germans. Most German Jewish families in Germany traced back many generations. If they did look stereotypically different, why did the Regime have to define "Jewishness" by the Nuremberg laws?

Regarding the second point, I would reply that Nazi propaganda promoted the idea that stealing from Jews to help Aryans is a Godly thing to do. Indeed, the Nazis funded their war machine to a large degree by the

⁷ See "British Soldier Allegedly Spares the Life of an Injured Adolf Hitler," accessed online at: <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/british-soldier-allegedly-s pares-the-life-of-an-injured-adolf-hitler>.

ruthless confiscation of Jewish resources: imposing a confiscatory “exit tax” for those Jews lucky enough to emigrate; stealing Jews’ financial assets; taking their personal property; working them to death; and burning their corpses and using the ash as fertilizer, the hair for cloth, the teeth for gold, and so on. The amount of property systematically seized from the Jews was valued in the billions of Reich marks, and as Gotz Aly argues, was likely the distinguishing feature of Nazi economics.⁸

I am also concerned about Garden’s view that the Nazi regime initiated the Aktion T4 program because of the outbreak of war and the “urgent need for hospital space for military purposes” (p. 215). This claim is dubious. First, as Michael Berenbaum notes, Hitler signed the order for the euthanasia program a month *after* the war commenced and back-dated the order to correspond with the declaration of war.⁹ Note, too, that the blitzkrieg in Poland hardly resulted in a massive wave of injured German soldiers; injured soldiers’ flooding the German domestic hospital system would only come later. Moreover, it was soon after the regime took power in 1933 that the Bavarian Minister of Health called for the euthanasia of the mentally retarded and psychopaths, indicating that this was already being implemented at local concentration camps. Berenbaum further indicates that, by 1934, mental institutions were instructed to withhold food and medical supplies from those in mental wards. Additionally, he quotes Hitler as saying, “Wartime is the best time for the elimination of the incurably ill.”¹⁰ *Pace* Garden, the degree to which the program was truly a measure to free up bed space for injured troops is highly debatable.

Garden’s cursory treatment of the Nazi films on eugenics, euthanasia, and sterilization raises another problem. A brief review of all of those films would have been useful, since it is a historical fact that the extermination of the mentally and physically disabled—especially during 1934 to 1941—laid the groundwork for the genocides to come. The most expedient ways to kill people (gassing and lethal injection in particular) were first explored on the disabled. The Aktion T4 program from 1939 to 1941 was just the transparent phase of this program, which started in 1933 and lasted until 1945. In addition to short films put out by the Office of Racial Policy to justify eugenics, the Reich’s Film Chamber produced a feature length melodrama, *I Accuse* (1941)—a film surprisingly not mentioned in Garden’s book—about a man seeking to get permission to allow him to assist his terminally ill wife to kill herself.

⁸ Gotz Aly, *Hitler’s Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2005).

⁹ Michael Berenbaum, “T4 Program: Nazi Policy,” s.v. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed online at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/T4-Program>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Understanding the importance of these films is crucial to understanding why *Olympia* really was propaganda. *Olympia* was shown in German theaters in 1937, the same year that key eugenicist shorts were being shown with all movies. Imagine the impact of seeing *both* films together. In the first, the viewer sees footage of the perfect human form celebrated, even glorified, while in the second the viewer sees footage of the severely disabled denigrated. Humans judge by contrast, psychologists have shown. What might the viewer's judgment of the disabled be at that point?

Regarding the "myths" Garden refutes, I think that two of them are straw men. Take the myth that all Nazi film was full of lies and so should be discounted. I doubt that anyone has held that a film like *Munchhausen* should not be enjoyed because it was produced by the Nazis, any more than we would oppose freeways because the Nazis built them. That would be a laughable example of the genetic fallacy. In addition, many Nazi films were not pure entertainment, and those that aren't *should be* discounted. Even Garden concedes that many contain historical distortion, and some contain gross historical fabrication (such as *Campaign in Poland*).

Even more troublesome is his critique of the claim that the Nazis were masters of propaganda, interpreting "mastery" to mean wielding the weapon flawlessly. However, being a master of something hardly means that one never makes mistakes; it means only that one does that thing far better than the vast majority of others. The Nazis employed propaganda in general and propaganda film in particular more effectively than anyone else, the Soviet regime included.

Most troublesome is Garden's sketchy analysis of what propaganda means. Garden tells us that while propaganda films often contain lies and/or fallacies, many don't; the latter sort mislead by selective presentation of facts. This lack of a clear delineation of what counts as propaganda renders unclear what counts as a "propaganda movie" and why. For example, why does Garden classify *Mrs. Miniver* as propaganda at all? Why include it in a book discussing movies such as *Jud Suss*? Because the protagonist captures a Nazi? This does not fit the pejorative sense of propaganda that Garden sketches; it only seems to fit the benign sense of the term.¹¹

My various objections do not change the fact that Garden's book is a valuable and substantial contribution to the history of film as well as the study of propaganda. Comprehensive, concise, and clearly written, it should be part of the library of anyone interested in the philosophy of film or propaganda theory.

¹¹ For a view of propaganda that allows us to classify clearly what should count as propaganda, see Gary James Jason, "Film and Propaganda I: What Nazi Cinema Has to Tell Us," *Reason Papers* 35, no. 1 (July 2013), pp. 203-19.

